

FEATURE

# Old Corps drill instructors relive glory days



Lance Cpl. Justin J. Shemanski  
**Bill Paxton, a retired sergeant major and former drill instructor, shows his enthusiasm by sharing a couple of stories during the story-telling contest at the Drill Instructors Reunion at Traditions April 23. Paxton went on to win the story-telling contest and the cadence-calling contest among retired Marines.**

**LANCE CPL.  
JUSTIN J. SHEMANSKI**  
*STAFF WRITER*

They trained the Marines that fought in the Pacific Theatre of World War II, the frozen fields of Korea and the jungles of Vietnam. They dedicated countless days and years to train the finest fighting force in the world.

Their days as drill instructors have faded like graying hair, but a couple of weekends out of the year, they all gather to enjoy the company of one another and associate with current drill instructors.

Marine Corps Drill Instructors, former and active duty, came to Parris Island April 23 and 24, to attend the Drill Instructor Reunion, hosted by the United States Marine Corps Drill Instructor Association.

Drill instructors from Parris Island as well as San Diego came out to participate in several scheduled events, ranging from cadence-calling contests to a golf tournament.

“These reunions are great because they allow us to show the active duty DIs that us former drill instructors are still motivated, dedicated and enthusiastic about the Corps,” said Bill Paxton, former drill instructor and member of the USMC DI Association. “It shows that we love them carrying on the tradition of putting on that duty belt and campaign cover to become a Marine drill instructor, to turn out the finest Marines.”

Paxton, who has been attending the reunions since they began in 1985, proved his dedication and motivation by getting up in front of dozens of former and active Marines to participate in a story-telling contest and later a cadence contest, both of which he won.

“This wasn’t the first time I’ve won awards like this, but that’s not the reason I get up there in the first place,” said Paxton. “The main reason I get up in

front of everyone is so that others will share their stories and experiences. It really makes me feel good when DIs, past or present, get up there to talk ... it takes a lot of guts for some guys to get out there, but that’s part of the fun.”

Though he didn’t get up to share a story, David Hatfield, a former drill instructor and USMC DI Association member, has also attended many of the reunions, hoping to bump into someone he knows from the past.

“I hope to see DIs that I served in the past with,” said Hatfield. “At one of them, I saw my series gunnery sergeant from when I was a recruit. He couldn’t believe I remembered him, but trust me, if you were caught by your series gunny writing a letter after taps, you’d remember his name too.”

The goal of these reunions is to get former drill instructors together with active duty Marines to share their experiences and pass things down they learned when they were on the drill field.

“I really encourage retired DIs to come out and talk to the younger guys training our Marines today,” said Paxton. “They can pass down their knowledge and maybe give them some pointers on training methods. I think the newer guys can really learn a lot by talking to us. That’s why the Marine Corps has all these different associations. It’s so Marines can get together and associate with each other ... they can share what they learned.”

Hatfield would like to see some more active duty drill instructors come to the reunions but understands why a lot of them do not come.

“I’d like to see more active duty guys show up, but I know how it is,” said Hatfield. “It’s something they may just not have time for. A lot of times they might not have an afternoon off in a while and might want to spend the time with their family instead. That’s just how it is being a drill instructor. But if they



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**Sergeant Maj. Richard Arndt, Depot sergeant major and former drill instructor, expresses himself during a story-telling contest at the Drill Instructors Reunion. Arndt took home the top prize for active duty participants.**

can make it out, it’s really worth their while.”

Hatfield and Paxton have been to the reunions from the start and have seen them come a long way from the first one.

“It’s great to see all the old timers from way back when I was on the drill field,” said Hatfield. “I was at the very first reunion when just a handful of guys showed up, and it was only one day. The word has spread and the turnout is better every year.”

Paxton encourages Marines that regularly attend to keep showing up.

“It gets better every year,” said Paxton. “Those that have come before, come again.”